

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 10, 2011

Agenda Item: Northern Shrub Steppe Initiative Co-op Sage Grouse Augmentation Project w/ Alberta

Division: Fish and Wildlife – Wildlife Bureau

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

Background

The Northern Shrub Steppe Initiative is a collaborative conservation effort among Montana and the neighboring provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Endorsed by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the NSSI brings FWP, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development–Fish & Wildlife Division, and Saskatchewan Environment together to conserve and manage native grassland and sagebrush habitats and sagebrush-dependent wildlife. Important partners include respective federal agencies, private sector organizations and landowners. The initiative supports the Western Governors Association’s Wildlife Corridors Initiative, which is intended to conserve important landscapes and crucial wildlife habitat while supporting responsible development activities.

Greater sage-grouse are a species of international concern in the region. Populations occupying the silver sagebrush habitats across this portion of the northern Great Plains represent the northern most extension of the species range. Previous genetic work, and on-going research, have documented how sage-grouse are connected across the three jurisdictions. Habitat degradation and population declines have lead to federal protection in Alberta and a recent “warranted but precluded” status under the Endangered Species Act across the species range in the western US. Sage-grouse populations are quite limited in distribution and abundance in southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan.

On-going efforts in Alberta seek to protect and restore habitat to support the remaining population. In January 2010, Alberta submitted an augmentation proposal seeking assistance to capture and relocate Montana grouse to the province as a tool to maintain populations as habitat conservation proceeds. On Aug. 5 the FWP Commission endorsed FWP to develop a proposal to translocate sage grouse to Alberta.

Public Involvement Process & Results

In December, FWP completed and released the Sage Grouse Translocation EA, which details the proposed translocation of up to 40 sage grouse from northeastern Montana Region 6 to southeastern Alberta to augment populations in silver sagebrush habitats. Public comment extended for 30 days and six comments were received. Several issues raised will be addressed in the final EA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends moving forward with the proposed translocation of 40 sage grouse to Alberta. Birds would be captured in April in South Phillips and Valley counties and transported and released in Alberta in a cooperative project between FWP and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission authorize FWP to translocate up to 40 sage grouse from northeastern Montana to Alberta.